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## Plan to retrain workers is winner

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There's a blizzard of ideas from the many presidential candidates about how to fix things, but one from U.S. Sen. John McCain jumps out for its particular importance to Michigan. It's a proposal that ought to survive whether or not the McCain candidacy does.

The Arizona senator wants to draft the nation's community colleges to retrain displaced workers -- from closed auto plants, for example -- for careers in growing fields and to tap federal resources to help maintain the incomes of those who take lower paying jobs while learning.

"Now that sounds like a real liberal kind of proposal," McCain recently told the Free Press editorial board, while insisting that he was a serious conservative. "What's the alternative?"

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has already put Michigan on this path with her No Worker Left Behind program that provides tuition for career training programs. To date, 7,000 workers have signed up; the goal is to retrain 100,000 people in three years for new careers. Federal assistance could greatly speed up the process.

The wage disparity subsidy would be expensive, but not if the country sees it as an investment in returning workers to higher-level careers. Federal help could be the deciding incentive for a former factory worker. It's also cheaper, and promises a better return, than social programs to help the unemployed.

McCain sees the nation's community college network as key to this effort, which would come as no surprise to Chancellor Curtis Ivery at Wayne County Community College District. He has an enrollment waiting list but nowhere near the resources to meet the hopes of displaced workers looking for retraining in high-demand areas such nursing.

McCain was vague on specifics -- but he's absolutely right that the key to retooling the economy in troubled states such as Michigan is retooling its work force.

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